

---

---

# "Christians On Guard"

SERMON PREACHED IN

ROBERTSON UNITED CHURCH  
EDMONTON, ALBERTA



REV. R. DOUGLAS SMITH  
B.A., B.D.

Sunday, March 1st  
1953

---

---



## CHRISTIANS ON GUARD

The Apostle Paul, in his letter to the Romans, deals with the high matters of Christian morality and sets the people, to whom he writes, on guard against the constant moral and spiritual down-currents of life. He presents the moral, or rather immoral conditions of pagan Rome. It is not a very lovely picture. "Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts".

There is something quite modern in the description which he gives of sexual licence and perversion, moral bankruptcy and corruption. Dr. Moffatt translates the 31st and 32nd verses of the 1st Chapter of Romans in this way,

"... devoid of conscience, false to their word, callous, merciless. Though they know the decrees of God that people who practise such vice deserve death, they not only do it but they applaud (or approve) those who practise it".

It is Christian conscience enlightened by the mind of Christ, that is to guide the Christians in their daily life. They are to be set like a tiny island in the midst of a sea of immorality. Their lives are to be empowered by the forces of the spirit of God in Jesus Christ. Throughout the Epistle to the Romans, there is a picture of a people surrounded and outnumbered by evildoers, but a people who possess the secret of life. Paul puts them on guard morally and spiritually.

"As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. If God be for us, who can be against us. We are sure that the judgement of God is against them which commit such things".

The mark of the Christian community is that it stands for a moral way. It is on guard against the evil that is about it.

### The Death of Civilizations.

Arnold Toynbee, the great historian, gives his judgment upon history by saying,

"Every civilization which has perished has died a suicide. When men refuse to give the central position in their thinking and living to moral and spiritual values, their civilization begins to die".

In other words, the conscience that is on guard against the encroachments of evil, is the prerequisite to strength.

### Underestimating the Power of Evil.

We have become very childlike in our attitude towards evil. "Is there a devil?", asked one enlightened youngster of another. "No", was the

answer, "It is like Santa Claus—it is your father". No longer believing in the personal aspects of a little man with a tail and with prompted fork and sneer of cold contempt—we have fallen into the error of thinking of evil as almost a friend. We have lost our fear of that which is wrong. We do not feel the need of praying, "Lead us not into temptation". We feel, that while we do not like the more developed forms of evil, like hatred, corruption, drunkenness and gross lust, it is all right to hate a little, cheat a little and lust a little. We are mildly amused at those who, in our novels and moving pictures, do these things. Perhaps the worst feature of it all is that we have created a new, or we think it a new virtue of tolerance and broad-mindedness, as distinct from a concern for what is right.

In the Niagara River, as indeed above every great cataract, there is a point of no return. Above this a person may successfully cross the river. But at a certain place the power of the current is such that one caught in it cannot escape being swept over the falls.

Morally, there is a point of no return. Our world is filled with illustrations of human, personal, national and international values being swept over the edge of destruction because people have ignored the danger. Gradually and imperceptibly they have been moved along until the roar of the cataract has awakened them too late.

#### Two Matters of Concern.

All of this is brought to a definite point by two issues which are before our own Legislature. I refer to:

1. The suggestion in the Speech from the Throne that there are to be revisions in the Liquor Control Act.
2. The action taken recently to relax the enforcement of the law re bingo and raffles.

With reference to the first, indications have been given which suggest that the Bill re Alberta's Liquor Act will contain revisions in the right direction. I am glad to hear this as I believe you are also. If this is so, it will be because of the mounting public opinion based upon a recognition of the present seriousness of our situation across the whole of Canada. There is, however, a constant pressure to increase the facilities for the sale of alcoholic beverages through more outlets, cocktail lounges, and the introduction of mixed drinking. Whatever this Bill may prove to be, we are not going to solve the problem on the level of legislation alone.

There is a powerful campaign backed by financial interests to make the drinking of alcoholic beverages socially acceptable. The advertising

is very subtle. Good will advertising is the most insidious of all. This past week in our own paper there was an advertisement suggesting that public safety depended upon drivers making a right or left turn from the proper lane. The advertisement was sponsored by Brewery interests. So we have public spirited benevolence disguised one of the things which is responsible for death riding our highways. There is not a person in this congregation this morning who would question that one of the chief contributing causes of our mounting death and accident toll on our highways is drink. If the number of people slaughtered on our highways and streets were being killed in Korea there would be a hue and cry about it. Day by day it goes on and we casually give consent to it.

#### **The Seriousness of Our Situation.**

The Presbyterian Church of the U.S.A. is responsible for the statement that "heavy drinking is fast becoming the way of life for a large section of the American nation." The New York Times has stated that there are 700,000 alcoholics in the state of New York. One of every twelve people in the state has become a problem to society. It would be comforting if we could say that those figures represent a trend which does not exist here. To suggest this is to live in a fool's paradise. Convictions for drunkenness have increased. Crime has increased. How many people are hanged every year because their crime of passion has been committed after alcohol has been taken? You and I are responsible to the extent that we treat lightly this thing that preys upon human weakness. Traffic fatalities have multiplied. More than once I have stood at the head of an open grave and I have not been able to repeat the words of committal—"Perasmuch as it hath pleased Almighty God". God has had nothing to do with it. Human folly has blazed its sordid trail.

Canada is spending two millions of dollars a day in the legal channels for alcoholic beverages. What the total bill is no one can say! When are we going to recognize that we are being swept nearer and nearer to national catastrophe? The answer is not in tinkering with the law here and there. Do not misunderstand me. I am in favor of everything that will limit the sale of these things just as I am in favour of the law which prevents a corner drug store from selling dope. Either we are going to do something to stand apart and stand against this mounting social pressure or else we will be pushed farther down the road by those whose selfish interest it is to make social drinking the thing to do.

#### **Something We Can Do.**

You are familiar with the call of our Church for voluntary total abstinence. This is one way and a very effective way of breaking a vicious kind of circle. In saying, "As far as I am concerned and as far as my home is

concerned, I will have nothing to do with it", we are taking action. If freedom means anything at all this is our right. There is a curious kind of hospitality which thinks that one must cater to those who desire cocktails but must not cater to those who do not want them. I have been at wedding receptions where nothing else has been offered to guests and I have seen as many as 75% of the glasses not touched. This is in the name of hospitality and freedom. It is a queer kind of hospitality which says, "Either you will drink what I think you ought to drink or you can go thirsty".

This problem which confronts us will only be solved on the level of high conviction. The time has come for drastic action. We must not wait, nor need we wait. Individuals by supporting voluntary total abstinence can make an immediate and effective contribution.

#### IS A LITTLE GAMBLING WRONG?

The second matter is closely related to the first. There are few of us, I imagine, who are not aware of the dangers and evils of gambling on a vast scale. The Irish Sweepstakes, for instance, produce only 1s 10d for the hospitals out of every 10s spent. This is expensive financing. In addition, it is estimated that one billion dollars worth of counterfeit tickets are sold every year. Football pool operators take 37.5% to 40%, and baseball pool operators 50% to 60%. It is impossible for a government to control corruption when such opportunities for gain are present.

Thomas E. Dewey, Governor of the State of New York, said: "The entire history of legalized gambling in this country and abroad shows that it has brought nothing but poverty, crime, corruption, demoralization of moral and ethical standards, and ultimately a lower living standard and misery for all the people".

#### Support the Federal Government's Stand

The present Federal Law is a good one. Unfortunately, it is being undermined by those who, in the name of charity, feel it is all right for people to engage in a little gambling. If the law is ambiguous, then the Alberta Legislature has a right to ask that it be clarified. But it has no right to say that it will ignore the law. Our Federal Parliament, in its determination to keep Canada from legalized sweepstakes, has withstood a good deal of pressure from groups, and I regret to say, some Service Clubs who are looking for an easy way to raise their funds. It is the duty of the Christian Church to stand guard lest we be pushed down the road toward social, moral and economic catastrophe.

In the year 410 A.D. Alaric the Visigoth sacked the proud city of Rome.

Augustine wrote his "City of God" and in it he showed that he saw why Rome was falling.

"They do not trouble about the moral degradation of the Empire. All that they ask is that it should be prosperous and secure. What concerns us, they say, is that everyone should be able to increase his wealth so that he can afford a lavish expenditure and keep the weak in subjection. Let the laws protect the right of property and let them leave mens' morals alone. Let there be sumptuous banquets where anyone can play and drink and gorge himself and be dissipated by day and night as much as he pleases or is able. Let the noise of dancing be everywhere and let the theatres resound with lewd amusement. Let the man who dislikes these pleasures be regarded as a public enemy".

Civilizations commit suicide. Christians are called to Stand on Guard lest Augustine's words be inscribed above the ruins of our day.

#### PRAYER

O God, help us to stand for the hard right against the easy wrong. Save us from habits that harm. Keep us ready to help others at some cost to ourselves. Make and keep strong this land we love. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.



